

November 8, 2004

Via fax [202-720-8871] and e-mail: FPB.DocketClerk@usda.gov

Standardization Section, Fresh Products Branch
Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
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Washington, DC 20250-0240

Reference: October 29, 2004, page 63132 and 63133 of the **Federal Register**

To Whom Concerned:

On behalf of THE UNITED STATES SWEET POTATO COUNCIL, its Board of Directors and the United States Sweet Potato Industry, **I am writing in support of adding the new grade, "U.S. Number One Petite"**, to the U.S. Grade Standards for Grades of Sweet Potatoes, as spelled out in your notice of October 29, 2004 on pages 63132 and 63133.

The recommendation for this new grade was approved by the Board of Directors of the Council at its Board Meeting in New Orleans, LA back on January 26, 2004. Board members representing all major sweet potato producing states(AL, AR, CA, LA, MS, NJ, NC, AND TX), including the Board's processor member from North Carolina, were present at the Board Meeting. Moreover, the recommendation for the new grade standard was presented to the Delegates to the Convention the next day at the Council's Business Meeting, and the Delegates were also in agreement with the new grade recommendation.

Our growers believe this new grade will enhance their marketing and their economic viability, as well as reduce product waste, and increase consumer choices. The produce trade, the major retailers and the wholesalers, has forced sizing standards on our shippers that are currently tighter than the sizing requirements of a U.S. Number One. They take the heart right out of a grower's production by demanding sweet potatoes that are 2 1/4 inches to 3 1/4 inches in diameter. Afterwards, growers have a surplus of smaller sized sweet potatoes with no place to go with them. Our shippers believe that being able to ship these smaller sized sweet potatoes as a "U.S. Number One Petite" will open new markets, and at the same time deliver a better quality product to consumers. There are some markets that prefer a smaller sized sweet potato but are not allowed to purchase them unless they are U.S. Number One.

Your positive consideration of our support will be appreciated and will be beneficial to our growers.

Sincerely,

Charles Walker, Executive Secretary

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